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WHAT IS FINE PRINTING ANYWAY? PART II
THE FATE OF THE ART: THE WESTERN EDITION

by Peter Rutledge Koch



In part one of this little essay (“What is Fine Printing Anyway?” QN-L Volume LXXIX, Number 2, Spring 2014), I discussed the articles of faith that defined “fine printing” for the American book collector circa 1924–1939, the “between the wars” heyday when book collectors prized contemporary fine printing and high craft, and why that tradition remains a valuable lesson today.

In this second portion I shall set out a few reasons for the decline in American fine and private press printing and attempt to describe a more recent and contemporary refinement of the fine press ideal.

From the end of the Depression to the period after World War II, there was a distinct decline in the value that collectors placed on fine press and private press books. The exceptions are notable, of course, and the rise in value of Kelmscott Press and Ashendene Press private editions are exemplary. But, for the most part, books published for the “gentleman’s library” neither held nor increased in value. At the same time, the finely printed book became more and more expensive to produce as the printing industry deserted letterpress printing and metal type *en masse* to retool for offset lithography and phototypesetting. As a direct consequence of modernization, the technology of letterpress printing became redundant and expensive to maintain. A fine press book published between the wars for the Book Club of California typically sold for between \$10 and \$20 a copy. After the war and by the end of the careers of the surviving prewar printers, letterpress-printed books in small editions were selling for between \$75 and \$250 a copy, and the \$1,000 barrier was first breached by the Arion Press edition of *Moby Dick* in 1979. There was a similar escalation in bookbinding costs. Hand-sewn binding became prohibitively expensive to produce, while machine-sewn and perfect binding promoted the inexpensive, mediocre, and relatively flimsy structure of today.

The two factors of rising costs to produce fine printed books and the dwindling of the market for those books caused the most famous trade presses like the Stinehour Press in Vermont and Martino Mardersteig's Stamperia Valdonega in Verona to close their monotype foundries and letterpress departments entirely by the turn of the millennium. Except for the two giants Mardersteig and Stinehour, even as early as the 1960s all that remained viable were "boutique" printers, individuals who by sheer determination and grit maintained the metal tradition. The brilliant technological innovations of desktop publishing (sophisticated typesetting programs and advanced design software like Adobe InDesign and Photoshop) combined with photopolymer plate-making technology have effectively usurped the role that the type foundry and monotype composition establishments like the legendary Mackenzie & Harris firm in San Francisco once played as the major type providers for high quality letterpress book work. These innovations have even further diminished the need for metal type, which has now all but disappeared.

Another, less noted, reason metal was left behind is because so few new type designs (can you name one of critical acclaim?) have become available from foundries since the 1960s, and many of the best on offer—monotype Bembo, for instance—date back to the 1920s. Younger printers, quite naturally, want to use up-to-date revivals and modern typefaces. The decline in the printed-from-lead typographic book has been dramatic. Again there are a few outstanding exceptions that prove the rule—the most obvious being the Bixler Press and Letterfoundry in Skaneateles, New York, and the Arion Press and Grabhorn Foundation's M&H Type in San Francisco. However, if new typefaces are rarely or never again designed for letterpress, it will not be long before metal type production, though a delightfully quixotic pursuit, will become either a lost art or a purely antiquarian exercise. We will see what the future holds.

After the war, the increased fidelity of advanced color lithography to reproduce artwork caused a significant rise in the value placed on the dust jacket as a marketing tool. Brilliantly colored artwork became the norm on the covers of books ranging from pulp fiction to trade hardcover. A relatively new concentration in book collecting arose from the ashes of the limited edition book when the "first printings" of novels in hard

cover by noted writers, signed, with perfect jackets, became THE collectible books.

Meanwhile, traditional fine press printing and publishing survived in a few pockets, notably the Limited Editions Club (now defunct), the Book Club of California (huzzah!), and a diminishing group of inspired private press printers and publishers. Historically, books considered to be works of art have been defined as belonging to one of several species. The first is books with original art in them. These follow the early twentieth century model of the *livre d'artiste* published by businessmen connoisseurs, most notably Ambroise Vollard, Henry Kahnweiler, and Albert Skira. George Macy's and, later, Sid Schiff's Limited Editions Club, and Andrew Hoyem's Arion Press in the United States are modeled after those early giants. Sandra Kirshenbaum once described the *livre d'artiste* tradition as one of luxuriously-made vehicles for famous artists: "you-look-great-on-the-wall-let's-see-how-you-look-in-a-book productions." The second species, fine printing, is characterized by the typographic book that matured in England and the United States between the wars and which mainly consists of *belles lettres* presented in a sophisticated typographic form, often with an illustrator commissioned to enliven the text. Among the more renowned American printers in this tradition were John Henry Nash and Edwin Grabhorn. California bibliophiles James D. Hart, in *Fine Printing: The San Francisco Tradition*, and Ward Ritchie, in *Fine Printing: The Los Angeles Tradition*, have each contributed exploratory essays about the California brand of fine printing. These historic practices are still alive today but no longer describe the entire field.

A New Phenomenon Arises

Beginning in the early 1960s there was a flourishing of intentionally cheap artist-produced books, exemplified by Ed Ruscha's brilliant and ultimately cynical exercise in banality, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, a series of unexceptional portraits of ordinary service stations along Route 66. These works, generally referred to as "artists' books," are characterized by mass-market and sometimes low-tech production techniques and pricing, with content driven by the latest art-critical theories: fluxus, pop,

minimalism, conceptualism, post-modernism, etc. For the most part, they are theory-driven (often anarchist or left-utopian) publishing experiments in what the jargon calls "democratic multiples," and thrive today in new media formats among art students, zinesters, and punks. These art-and-fashion-conscious books have been documented and examined in great detail by, among others, Johanna Drucker in her extended essay, *The Century of Artists' Books*, and Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot in their seminal collection, *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists' Books*. This school of bookmaking continues to grow in popularity and is currently promoted by Printed Matter's New York and Los Angeles art book fairs and in the pages of Brad Freeman's highly contentious *Journal of Artists' Books* (JAB) published by the Center for Book & Paper Arts at Columbia College, Chicago.

In 1975, however, a "deep-structure" approach to the book as a work of art began to take shape in California and elsewhere. For a few young artists, bored with the cheap and oft-times uninspired alternative press productions of the 1960s and early '70s, the discipline and dedication of master-craftsmanship began to appeal for its more enduring sense of appropriateness and integrity that was so obviously missing from the cynical and helter-skelter mass-market-driven pop-art environment. In northern California in the 1970s and '80s, a movement led by William Everson, Jack Stauffacher, and Adrian Wilson exposed brilliant young students and apprentices, including a mix of artists and writers, to the traditions of printing and the Arts and Crafts movement, with its offspring, the fine press movement. Inspired by these elder printers and visionary teachers to see virtue in authentic letterpress printing, hand- and mould-made papers, and hand bookbinding, a few of the young artists began to create more sophisticated books. This newly refreshed publishing wave has been well documented in Sandra Kirschenbaum's journal *Fine Print* (1979-1990), W. Thomas Taylor's *Bookways* (1991-1995), and *Parenthesis*, the journal of the Fine Press Book Association (1998-present).

The New Book Takes Shape

By the late 1970s the challenge of high craft, coupled with a comprehensive and sophisticated approach to a book's conceptual, physical, and

formal properties, required more of the book as art form than ever before. No longer would books with art in them be enough—the book-as-object began to accumulate layers of meaning that were never before considered. Social contexts of production (handmade vs. machine made; small workshop vs. industrial factory) as well as concerns regarding physical structure as a design element upon which meaning depends, were added to the list of a book's content. Binding structure began to be called upon to reflect the conceptual nature of the text and the image flow as well as the historical associations connected to the content. The means of producing and manufacturing of the material components—including book cloth and paper, thread, glues, and metals—became integral to the making and the meaning of books. Books and articles critical of the theories and values represented by more traditional examples of typographic fine press printing and the *livres d'artistes* that had previously defined the limited edition style began to appear. This change of paradigm caused by both a broadened and a deeper idea of what constitutes an art object in turn caused a deepening concept of the art of the book, which has matured greatly in the last thirty years. Younger artist-printers today collaborate with other artists and writers and are joined, influenced, and informed by conservation bookbinders, artisanal papermakers, typographic designers, and digital media engineers, as well as by contemporary scholarship in the art and history of the book. In addition, the younger printers have added into their historical vocabularies the more recent inventions of conceptual, minimal, and postmodern art. By the 1990s a movement characterized as a “letterpress phenomenon” had clearly emerged—well illustrated in David Jury's *Letterpress: The Allure of the Handmade*, published in London in 2000.

To describe the fresh and differing approaches to the *mise-en-page* in relationship to the total book is not possible in this short article. That would require a lengthy and well-illustrated treatise, but there is a profoundly fresh approach to be noted. Today we are in the presence of a number of book artists who have emerged from within an artistic, literary, and philosophical tradition deeply rooted in verbal-visual or what a colleague of mine refers to as word-image disciplines. These disciplines are not the same as those so well studied by their masters and their masters before them. The younger artists have a greater grasp of contemporary

art and the ever-shifting boundaries of new media. With a few brilliant exceptions in which there appears no text in letterform at all, the vast majority of work that I am referring to exhibits a heightened sense of the materiality of the book and a collaborative fusion between structure, text, and image.

A brilliant example of this new and enriched format is Carolee Campbell's 1995 riverine masterpiece, *The Real World of Manuel Cordova* by W.S. Merwin, which unfolds into almost sixteen feet of poem and river. A profile of the Amazon River is printed beside and interwoven with Merwin's long poem about Manuel Cordova Rios, who was kidnapped in the late nineteenth century and raised to be the tribal chieftain of a Stone Age culture in the Peruvian jungle. The book is printed on hand-dyed Kakishibu paper and bound in flax wrappers. You can feel the leaves rustle in the jungle canopy when you open the book and follow with your finger the course of the upper Amazon while you read the electrifying text. Carolee's synaesthetic approach is both typographically dramatic and appropriate to the experience of reading the poem, while the "feel" of the book is almost Paleolithic in its simple and ancient-appearing structure—more like a cave painting than a late-twentieth-century art object.

In 1998 Felicia Rice at her Moving Parts Press designed and printed *Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol*, performance texts by Guillermo Gomez-Pena with collage imagery by Enrique Chagoya. The text, typeset in a variety of fonts to suggest differing performative voices is staggered and tilted about Chagoya's hieroglyphic images and printed on Amatl bark paper. The rough hand-made and treated bark paper, directly descended from the Mayan codex, lends an ancient patina and texture to the images constructed from Mayan hieroglyphs, Walt Disney cartoon characters, and comic-book images of warfare and violence. The overall effect is of holding an ancient codex shot through with disturbingly modern and violent images and texts—a brilliant merging of image, material form, and text.

I could list a great many more examples going back to 1975 and *Granite and Cypress*, William Everson's masterful homage to Robinson Jeffers' poem; moving forward to *Séquelle* by Petr Herel, Jean Tardieu, and Frédérique Martin-Scherrer, designed and printed by Zone Opaque

for Librairie Nicaise (Paris 2009); and ending with Russell Maret's just-completed exercise in extreme letterpress color printing, *Interstices & Intersections or, An Autodidact Comprehends a Cube*.

A perusal of both volumes of Jury and Koch's *Book Art Object* and Krystyna Wasserman's *The Book as Art: Artist's Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts* will suffice to give the reader a sense of the vast extremes and the vitality and international character of the present scene. The new art of the book has matured into an art form that exceeds all former standards for the book as object.

There has never been a better time for innovative books than today. While today's imaging technologies have taken paper-based print to new heights of resolution and color, binding material and structural innovations have never been better documented and available. Technology for making paper, from hand-made to synthetic, is at the top of its form. Communications have never been swifter. A market is rapidly growing.

With an ever-deepening awareness of the social history of art and work, respect for artisanal production, and an awareness of innovative applications of technique and tools, we are experiencing a tremendous aesthetic shift—reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts movement a century ago. From a global perspective, a considerable portion of the books produced in the last forty years with such enriched criteria and more complex intentions in mind were made in California and the West—while the West as a distinct geographical locus of book arts has been only partially explored and remains relatively under-represented in major North American and European exhibitions and catalog publications.

Fortunately, this new conception of the book as a work of art is beginning to find a home in the libraries of discerning collectors, academic research institutions, and with studio artists around the world. These books and their kind are readily to be seen firsthand at the Fine Press Book Association fairs in Oxford, England; New Castle, Delaware; and, most recently, New York City; and at the CODEX International Book Fair and Symposium coming up in Richmond and Berkeley in 2015.

Note to the collector: no definitive bibliography yet exists to guide us—we are still pioneering the field. The blush is still on the rose.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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INTERVIEW WITH CAROLEE CAMPBELL
ABOUT BCC PUBLICATION #233, *POETRY AT THE EDGE:*
FIVE CONTEMPORARY CALIFORNIA POETS
by Georgie Devereux

In late fall 2014, the Book Club will publish its 233rd book, *Poetry at the Edge: Five Contemporary California Poets*. Conceived and designed by Carolee Campbell of Ninja Press, printed by Norman Clayton of Classic Letterpress, and bound by Klaus-Ullrich Röttscher at the Pettingell Book Bindery, the book will feature poems by California poets Michael Hannon, Martha Ronk, Kay Ryan, Joseph Stroud, and Gary Young, with original photographs by Carolee. In anticipation of the book's publication, Carolee graciously agreed to discuss the process of creating it.

GD: What made you choose these five poets, and why these particular poems?

CC: It was during a Publications Committee meeting that I asked when the last book of poetry had been published by the Club. No one really knew, but everyone agreed it was a good idea to think about publishing such a book. I was asked what I had in mind. I had nothing in mind—then. I was asked to think about it. Slowly over the next several meetings it appeared, as I offered suggestions and ruled out possibilities, that I was taking up the reigns of this project. I couldn't have been more surprised since that was not my original intent. So as I began to think about editing, I decided to take the task on as if it were going to be a Ninja Press book, being mindful of the Club's readership. Ideas jelled quickly.

It was important to me that the publication be a book of contemporary poetry by living California poets. Rather than a more comprehensive anthology, it would include the work of only five poets, with seven poems by each. This would allow the reader to hear the poets' voices more fully fleshed out. I chose writers whose work I had read in depth, whose work I admire enormously, and whose voices are unique, one from the other. My final reason for choosing this selection? Aside from their poetry, the

poets are all people who are deeply interesting and likeable. The seven poems by each poet were selected out of a large body of their work. There could have been seven other poems, times seven.

GD: The poems are cast in a wide range of formats—from Gary Young’s prose poems to Kay Ryan’s compressed lines. What, if any, were the challenges of laying out such diverse formats within a single book?

CC: Each of the five poets writes in an equally diverse manner when it comes to the line lengths of their poems, yet they all need to find comfort within the same page dimensions.

Before I even begin to think of the book’s page size and overall dimensions, my method has always been to find the longest poem in the collection followed by the poem with the longest line. After the type style is selected, I set the longest poem first, then the poem with the longest line. That begins to give me a page dimension. In *Poetry at the Edge*, Joseph Stroud has both the longest and the widest poems: “Lodestone” and “Waking.”

Design considerations included finding harmony between Kay Ryan’s narrow strands of words, Gary Young’s justified poems without titles, and Martha Ronk’s very long titles. These to be mixed in with Joseph Stroud’s and Michael Hannon’s long and short poems.

With a page dimension in mind, I quickly folded up paper to size, printed out the poems, and began moving each poem onto its page until a visual harmony was found for each double-page spread.

GD: How does subject matter influence design and typographic decisions—for this book and in general?

CC: The subject matter of a book influences the design utterly. Early on I conceived of the title, *Poetry at the Edge: Five Contemporary California Poets*. The overall design flowed out from there: the edge of California, the sea and its coastline. From there came color: the cobalt blue of the handmade cover paper, the tan of the book-cloth spine (sea meets sand),

the use of the deckle on the cover paper to evoke the sea's edge, the tan fly leaves, the use of blue and brown ink for the interior, these colors all in harmony with the photograph frontispiece. Disparate choices united to make a whole.

GD: What about the typeface?

CC: I selected Walbaum because it is beautiful without calling attention to itself. This is an important quality for printing a collection of poetry by five individual voices. Walbaum has made the transition from its original nineteenth-century letterpress form to digital technology without losing any of its strength of character. It is very felicitous on the page.

GD: You have a background in photography, and plan to incorporate your own photographs in the book. Could you talk a bit about the relationship between poetry and photography?

CC: As for the photographs, in my view it is very tricky to use photography in a book of poetry. A photograph can influence the reader by planting a particular image in the mind, thereby diminishing the range of imagination and poetic vision the poet is conjuring. The two times I have used photographs I have taken in Ninja Press editions, the images have either been in extreme close-up or out-of-focus. In *Poetry at the Edge* the photographs are close-up and more graphic than illustrative, underscoring, as with the other design elements, the title of the book.

Ironically, it was through photography that I stumbled into making books; that is, wanting to make a book to put my photographs in. I was working in nineteenth-century hand-coated photographic processes: platinum, cyanotype, salted paper. I wanted to make a book of them.

My first bookbinding classes were in 1980 with Margaret Lecky in Los Angeles. During the first class I learned that I would begin by taking a book apart in order to rebind it using the conservation and preservation techniques that I would learn in class. No blank books! No "book structures"! I continued taking that class for three years. Only towards the end was I allowed to make a book for my photographs.

GD: What about poetry and acting, given your former career? Or printing and acting? I think of performance across the page, the breath of lines, for example. But you have worked in so many art forms! Maybe the question should really be, how do they all influence one another?

CC: Printing poetry, acting, river rafting, kendo (Japanese fencing)—they are all the same. Their physical manifestations differ but they are united in their guiding principals: rigor, process, technique, steadfastness, and the willingness to apprentice yourself to the craft. Talent? 10%. Showing up? 90%. Constancy? 100%.

GD: Your website reads, “Eventually, [Carolee] expanded her work into letterpress printing, thereby opening the way into contemporary poetry—confronting it for the first time with a directness and penetration she had seldom experienced as a reader.” Could you talk a bit about this experience and how printing contemporary poetry has affected your relationship to it?

CC: The experience of printing poetry, setting the type by hand and printing letterpress, has unquestionably altered the poetic experience for me. It is a great poetic banquet that is set before me when encountering a set of poems I have decided to publish—from the first reading, through countless additional readings, to setting the type letter by letter. It is a banquet seen as a whole initially, then taken apart, ingredient by ingredient, and tasted separately before becoming whole again. Typesetting poetry offers me an entryway, a penetration into the heart of the work that I have never experienced as a reader.

GD: Is there a difference between printing contemporary poetry—by living poets—and work by poets who are no longer alive?

CC: I have published only three books of work by writers who are no longer living, Guillaume Apollinaire, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. While I took pleasure in working on those famous texts, the pleasure of getting to know the living poets I have published has been

sweet beyond dreaming. I don't share the work of designing the book with the poet. Nor do I ask for his or her approval at intervals in the design process. However, we are in frequent contact and friendships form. And in the end, the book has become the artifact of that relationship.

CAROLEE CAMPBELL is the proprietor of Ninja Press, which is now in its thirtieth year, in Sherman Oaks, California. Campbell designs, prints, and binds each limited edition at the press. The entire Ninja Press archive is held at the Davidson Special Collections Department of the University of California at Santa Barbara.



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THE FIRST CODEX AUSTRALIA
INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR & SYMPOSIUM
by Donald Kerr

Alan Loney and the organizing team of 2014 Codex Australia are to be congratulated. Over the weekend of March 1–2, 2014, the inaugural Codex Australia Symposium was held in Melbourne, Australia. Well over seventy people attended, with countries such as Israel, Germany, China, USA, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand represented. It was truly a grand occasion. Book Club of California members Peter Koch, Susan Filter, David Pascoe, and Richard and Cathy Wagener were present and accounted for.

And it started well. A welcome reception was held on Friday night at the Australian Print Workshop in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy. APW are key authorities in the field of contemporary Australian printmaking. They also house a number of large printing presses, which, particularly the Columbian “Eagle” press, certainly grabbed the attention of many of the letterpress printers who attended. In between all the conviviality, there was a book launch of a Codex Australia chapbook: *10 books/5 makers* (2014).

The two mornings of the Symposium were dedicated to talks on various aspects of the book and book production. The first speaker on Saturday was Caren Florance, owner-operator of Ampersand Duck in Canberra. Her talk, “Sharing Book Spaces,” was a delightful romp through her beginnings as a letterpress printer and the work she has achieved thus far. Caren is now recognized as one of Australia’s better-known and innovative letterpress printers. Lyn Ashby was next. He operates thistoopress in Melbourne and his talk was entitled, “Through the Looking-Glass: What Do Books Tell Us About Ourselves?”. Lyn favors limited-edition digital productions, and it is through his works that he explores the nature of books and how they reflect not only the wider world but also the inner workings of the artist. As founder of the Printer in Residence program at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, I am always searching for new and innovative approaches to printing. Lyn’s work—with a melding of digital and letterpress—represents an exciting possibility.

The first keynote speaker was Peter Koch, the San Francisco-based printer, publisher, and founding director of the Codex Foundation, USA. His “Codex and the Future of the Bibliosphere” provided an overview of the initiative, success, and spread of the Codex “movement”: from printing press rooms and studios to book fairs; from San Francisco to Mexico City and now to Melbourne. His vision (shared by his wife Susan Filter) is an optimistic one for the Book Beautiful reconceived as a fine press artist’s book. His invitation to 2015 Codex USA has us all counting our pennies.

The second day began with my talk, “The Printer in Residence Program at the University of Otago.” Started in 2003, this annual program commissions a letterpress printer from New Zealand or Australia to print one limited edition book per year, usually around August. The aim of the program is to encourage use and awareness of the press room facilities (a Columbian “Eagle” press, an Albion press, a Vandercook proofing press, and a variety of wooden and metal types), and to foster bookmaking within the university environment and the wider arts community. The program is a unique one in Australasia.

Tim Moseley, owner-operator of Silverwattle Bookfoundry in Queensland, then presented “Re/membering Touch: An Investigation into the Haptic Touch of Books by Artists.” Mosely’s emphasis on the importance of touch in making and reading books was made more evident in the display of his materials at the Book Fair. Ripping and tearing a page in one of his creations (which I did, reluctantly, upon being asked) made real the points given in his talk. Touch is certainly an aspect of bookmaking that deserves further discussion.

Finally, Monica Oppen from Ant Press, Sydney, delivered the presentation, “Hits and Misses: The Challenge of Realizing and Enhancing Content Through the Book’s Design and the Choice of Production Processes and Materials.” It was illuminating in that it highlighted decisions made by the artist/bookmaker on how best to achieve a desired outcome. It was a journey of growth and development—not only of the three books she discussed (in all their formats) but also of the artist herself. She admitted mistakes; she was courageous enough to share them.

Two afternoons were taken up with the Book Fair, with thirty-two tables dedicated to thirty-two different presses displaying a full range

of printed books and ephemera. The fair was open to the public. The range displayed was extraordinary, indicating not only a real wealth of activity in the field of bookmaking, but also a fine display of creativity. Australian presses included Ampersand Duck, Ant Press, Barbara Davidson, Bruno Leti, Electio Editions, Impediment Press, Light-Trap Press, Psyclonic Studios, Red Rag Press, Silverwattle Bookfoundry, and thistoopress. International presses included Alembic Press (UK), Carivari (Leipzig), Del Milion (California), Even Hoshen Press (Israel), Editions Koch (California), Leilei Guo (China), Nawakum Press (California), Usus (Germany), and Richard Wagener (California). New Zealand representatives included Steiner Press (Auckland), The Holloway Press (University of Auckland), and The Pear Tree Press (Auckland). Various bookbinders, a calligrapher (Deirdre Hassed), and paper merchants also had their wares on display.

Personal highlights included seeing Lyn Ashby's digital books; Tim Moseley's relief print books, which, because of his concern for touch (haptic), involved overlapping translucent printed pages and constructed shapes within pages; the preliminary sheets of Juliana O'Dean's *Twelve Poems* by Les Murray (2014); Caren Florance's *Out of Shape* (2104) by Dunedin poet Sue Wootton; Peter Koch's superb *Paris* by Christopher Carrol, and *I'll Die Tomorrow* by Mickey Spillane with photographs by Karen Filter; and David Pascoe's (of Nawakum Press) publication of Alan Loney's *LOOM* and Borges's *The Book of Sand*. As always, it was great to see the typographic printing by Tara McLeod of The Pear Tree Press fame. McLeod is the best hand-craft printer in New Zealand and his works continue to bedazzle.

And as one who has custodial care over numerous private press and limited-edition publications, there was the opportunity—and a grand one at that—to view books for purchase for our collection. I had much fun talking to the makers of the books on display and am now slowly working through a purchase hit-list.

One other invaluable benefit of this Codex Australia event was the contacts made. As mentioned above, the University of Otago Library has a Printer in Residence program, established in 2003 and run each year in August. From the gathering at the Melbourne Codex, I was able to meet individuals who ran similar programs (for example Marion Crawford

at Monash University, Melbourne) as well as letterpress printers who could well be part of our program. Indeed, Peter Koch's kind words about Otago's PIR program led to a discussion about the efforts by all to continue the craft of letterpress printing. Workshops to teach the skills of letterpress printing and getting new younger blood into the field of printing were two methods universally agreed upon.

And of course all this conviviality over books and book production continued with great dinners at local Melbourne restaurants, and book launches, notably the launch of Alan Loney's *LOOM*, beautifully produced by David Pascoe's Nawakum Press.

Attending Codex Australia was rejuvenating, and from my perspective a seamless, without-hiccups, event. I started with a thank you to the organizers. It is befitting that they get another congratulatory pat on the back for hosting this very successful event. I look forward to the next Codex Australia.

DONALD KERR is the special collections librarian at Otago University, Dunedin, New Zealand.



❖ NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING ❖

Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 2 p.m.

The Book Club of California
312 Sutter Street, Suite 500, San Francisco

FOR THE LOVE OF LETTERPRESS:
AN ENGAGING READ ON AN ENGAGING PROCESS
by Camden M. Richards

Reviewed in this article:

For the Love of Letterpress: A Printing Handbook for Instructors & Students
by Cathie Ruggie Saunders & Martha Chiplis
Illustrated. 160 pages. Bloomsbury. \$27.95.

Letterpress printing is a revolutionary art form, yet there are few contemporary books that adequately cover the full spectrum of the historical, technical, and creative processes behind it. Writing the perfect manual—summarizing over 500 years of printing history, conveying a sense of the physicality that using a behemoth machine to render often delicate letterforms entails, while helping the reader understand the important relationship between content and form via the creative process—would be no easy feat. After all, letterpress printing is something that must be learned by hand and in person, not from a book. Words and images alone are not enough to transmit the joys of printing: the sensation of cold metal in one's hands, the stain of ink beneath one's fingernails, the whir of the running press, the evolving texture of soft paper, and the haptic quality of the final print. That said, a book can serve as a wonderful entrée to the tactical journey. *For the Love of Letterpress* does just that: it is engaging and accessible, with content structured to appeal to a broad cross section of readers. Chapters of factual prose are coupled with eloquent passages on theory and the creative process. Lovers of fine press books, graphic design students, novice and expert printers, experimental artists and printmakers, and book and printing arts educators will find this book stimulating and worthy of savoring and sharing.

The book is split up into logical chapters on subjects ranging from the history of letterpress to the tools, supplies, and materials necessary for the craft, and from historical printing methods to contemporary and experimental practices. It culminates with chapters about the importance of the artistic process, including chapters on concept development and detailed planning for a successful final work, from appropriate typeface,

paper, and color selection to the relationship between content and structure. In short, the book is a solid overview—not overly in-depth in any one area, it is a suitable primer for those new to the field or in search of guidance to help teach others, or for bibliophiles wishing to understand and better appreciate the inner workings of letterpress printing in the production of the Book Club’s books.

While the chapters detailing printing technique are clear and succinct, the last few chapters on the creative process—regarding letterpress printing as a fine art form—set this book apart. The relationship of content to form and structure within the creative process is often overlooked in practical letterpress printing manuals. The act of teaching the physical printing process is so time consuming that, frequently, cultivation of artistic vision is often given short shrift, if not completely forgotten. This book is unique because it provides instruction on practical printing techniques as well as on the art of printing as a method of expression in itself rather than a simple means to an end. Strip away the creative process and even the savviest print technician cannot create a truly successful work. Learning the *how* is fundamental, but so is learning the *why*. To this end, the penultimate chapter contains a gallery of sample letterpress printed fine art works from a range of artists, with occasional artist commentary on process and concept. I only wish the authors had been able to fit in more samples and more dialogue from the artists, something that can shed more light on the often elusive artistic process.

As instructors of book arts, it is our duty to teach the physical processes, but also to cultivate, support, challenge, and facilitate the expression of ideas from our students. This book does just that, for students new to the craft and those who have been in the field for a long time, by presenting letterpress printing as a form not just of practical communication, but also one of powerful expression. In the first chapter, the author writes, “It is this historical legacy that I feel connected to in the studio, a process that was fundamental to the cultural evolution of the world. In a humbler context, it speaks to what I love best: sharing ideas. Most undergraduate students now have lived with computers all of their lives. For them to have the experience of creating a book from concept to layout to production, with lead type, paper, ink, thread, book cloth, and glue, engenders a

level of ownership and engagement that is rarely attainable elsewhere.... Teaching letterpress celebrates literacy, history, creativity, and the sensual artifact.” For those interested in understanding the whole mind-body process and experience of letterpress printing as a fine art form, this book delivers.

CAMDEN M. RICHARDS is an East Bay, California-based designer, printmaker, and teacher who specializes in the design, craft, and experimental creation of artists’ books and prints, incorporating various fine arts methods such as bookbinding, papermaking, printmaking, illustration, design, letterpress printing, and collage. She creates work under her imprint, Liminal Press + Bindery, and is the co-owner of Studio Ephemera, a design and letterpress shop.



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SIGHTINGS
by Carolee Campbell

Otis College of Art and Design sits squarely between the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve and the runways of the Los Angeles International Airport. The landmark mid-century modern building was designed by the industrial architect, Eliot Noyes, who studied under Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus. It was completed in 1964 to house the IBM Aerospace Headquarters. The college bills itself as “L.A.’s premier Art and Design school since 1918.”

On January 25, an exhibition of artists’ books entitled *Binding Desire: Unfolding Artists Books* opened in Otis’s Ben Maltz Gallery. The books were selected from the Otis Millard Sheets Special Collections Library by a curatorial aggregation of nine faculty and staff members along with four project advisors. This robust team selected approximately 120 works, dating from the 1960s to the present, from the 2,100 artists’ books held in the collection.

The introductory wall description read as follows: “The Otis Artists’ Book Collection is one of the largest in Southern California. It houses a wide range of works representing every genre of artists’ books by luminaries such as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, and Ed Ruscha, as well as significant works from major centers of production like Beau Geste Press, Paradise Press?, Printed Matter, Red Fox Press, and Women’s Studio Workshop. A foundational strength of the collection is its holdings of artists’ books made in the 1960s and 1970s—a time when this material was often not collected by libraries because so much of it was hard to define, catalog and house.”

The exhibition was an intentionally eclectic selection of work that reflected both the pedagogical priorities of the current faculty and their personal expertise and interests.

Seeing the works in the exhibition confirmed the direction and scope the faculty hopes to instill in the students who have elected to minor in book arts through a limited offering of classes: letterpress printing, book structures, and printmaking.

A few quibbles: the online exhibition information seemed to be careful in listing all the artists (some ninety-five on one online site), even

including some but not all of the poets when their work was included in a book. This is surprising for a show of artists' books. The names were listed in the introductory wall description as well. Two book artists exhibited in the show went missing from both the online promotional material and the wall: Richard Minsky, whose umbrella book was beautifully displayed, and Carolee Campbell (this reporter). Minsky's and Campbell's names made it only onto the postcard. Also missing were the collaborators of books by Larry Bell (Guy de Cointet), George Hermes (Majima Hermes), and Annette Gates (Cynthia Lollis).

Included in the exhibition was a wall-mounted flat screen monitor showing a video loop of some of the books being paged through. This can be wonderfully helpful in an exhibition of books. However, one of the books was headlined as being by the book artist, Gary Young. Gary Young was the poet of the book. The book artists were C&C Press/Matt Cohen and Sher Zabazskiewicz.



The "Clark Quarterly" hosts four speakers a year at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles. Lecture topics focus on the history of the book, book collecting, publishing history, and the book arts and fine printing, as well as the subjects central to the Clark—Oscar Wilde, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British and Continental literature, history, and culture.

On March 4, Russell Maret presented a lecture on the making of his most recent publication, *Interstices & Intersections or, An Autodidact Comprehends a Cube*. Russell is a type designer and letterpress printer from New York City who was one of two design recipients of the coveted Rome Prize for 2009, sponsored by the American Academy of Rome. Winners are invited to Rome to pursue their work in a community of visiting artists and scholars for a period of some months. Russell went to Rome to document and study diverse epigraphic lettering styles as source material for new digital typefaces, which he will use in his limited edition books.

The lecture Russell presented at the Clark was entitled "Comprehending a Cube: Eighteen Months of Living with Euclid." It covered his

investigations and interactions with a selection of thirteen propositions from Euclid's *Elements*, a mathematical and geometric treatise consisting of thirteen books written by the ancient Greek mathematician in Alexandria, c. 300 BC. *Elements* is considered to be unquestionably the best mathematics text ever written and is likely to remain so into the distant future.

Russell began his research for the book by reading and then, astonishingly, drawing a proof for each of the propositions in Euclid's thirteen books. He did this in order to discover certain propositions that were interesting or particularly relevant to him, "sparking associations in literature, letter forms, or life, or all three," as he says on his blog. He began "to develop visual ideas, write bits of text, and read other books that might inspire or relate to the proposition at hand." The thirteen propositions he ultimately selected were not chosen for their relationship to one another but for their relevance in his life. He would print them with accompanying diagrammatics, pairing each proposition with a companion textual and visual commentary of his own.

As Russell proceeded through the slides, we saw the opening diagrammatic spread that he cranked through the press eighteen times to get the depth of color he wanted. For another spread, ten photopolymer plates were printed using his handmade inks with hand-ground ultramarine and cobalt blue pigments. The text was printed using Russell's proprietary typefaces, Gremolata and Cancellaresca Milanese, on Twinrocker handmade paper. All in all, *Interstices & Intersections* is made up of thirty spreads, which required 225 press runs.

We were gratified to be able to peruse a finished copy of *Interstices & Intersections* as it sat next to the Clark Library's own copy of Euclid's *Elements*. This copy is listed in the library's catalog as follows: "Elements. English. 1570. The elements of geometrie of the most auncient philosopher Euclide of Megara. / Faithfully (now first) translated into the Englishe tounge by H. Billingsley, citizen of London."

Russell has kept a detailed running commentary on his blog, covering each stage of the process for this book, from his nascent thoughts about the project, through to its completion. He has even included his ink formulas. It is compelling reading. (russellmaret.com)



On March 16 the peripatetic Paul Moxon swung by Southern California to give his talk on “The Versatile Vandercook” at the International Printing Museum in Carson, just south of downtown Los Angeles. The talk was co-sponsored by both the museum and the Southern California Chapter of the American Printing History Association.

Paul is a studio letterpress printer, itinerant teacher, and author of *Vandercook Presses: Maintenance, History and Resources*. Principally, he teaches two-day workshops, including “Vandercook Maintenance” and “Proof Press Finesse,” as well as longer “Introduction to Letterpress” courses. He visits teaching institutions, book arts centers, and associations all over North America from Newfoundland and Labrador to Georgia, California, Mississippi, and points in between.

Paul’s press name, Fameorshame, was inspired by this passage in Jan Tschichold’s *The Form of the Book*:

The author fears the typesetter, the printer fears the binder, and the designer is afraid of all four. He feels responsible. Yet, in spite of eagle eyes and the greatest circumspection, like the body guard of a dictator, he knows that mistakes will happen. He’s been there. So he leaves both fame and shame to the pedestrians who, in naïve self love, line themselves up on the page of particulars and wish to be noticed even before a single line of text has been read.

Paul has been a major contributor to the website, Letterpress Commons, posting numerous invaluable essays detailing the Vandercook flat-bed proof press in all its permutations. Thirty thousand Vandercook presses (some ninety different models in all) were manufactured in Chicago between 1909 and 1976. Today, more than 1,800 presses representing forty models have been identified in an ongoing, worldwide census compiled by Paul at vandercookpress.info.

The talk at the International Printing Museum covered minute details on many models of the Vandercook, including photographs of the first

model, the Rucker, built in 1909 with pictures of its developer, R.O. Vandercook. Paul was able to show us the workings of the Rucker *in situ* on an existing model, part of the vast collection of presses at the International Printing Museum in Carson.

Paul Moxon exudes such printing press fervor that those with any lesser passion for the subject might go away simply shaking their heads. For the acolytes in attendance, it was mother's milk.



For a Robinson Jeffers bibliography to be published in 2015

INFORMATION WANTED

For a new *Bibliography of the Works of Robinson Jeffers* now in preparation for publication by a leading publisher of bibliographies, I am seeking **confirmation of the original prices and publication dates** for many post-1932 books with Jeffers contributions.

I'm also seeking information on other **small press or non-professional press, limited-quantity books, broadsides, pamphlets, cards, posters**, and the like with Jeffers poems or excerpts from Jeffers poems, whether intended for sale or distributed free for any kind of public or private occasion.

Items outside the scope of this project include manuscripts, letters, periodicals, and publications entirely in a language other than English.

On request, I will send a list of the information I know is missing. However, I also very much want to hear about items not now known to me (which is to say, also not in the online catalogs of institutional Jeffers collections). Accordingly, I urge anyone with a Jeffers item of a kind described above that seems unusual, local, small-quantity, or easily overlooked to contact me by any of the methods indicated below.

Michael Broomfield | 15 W. 81st St #10E | New York, NY 10024
(212) 877-6502 | mbroom1@earthlink.net

ROBERT D. HARLAN
AUGUST 4, 1929 — APRIL 8, 2014
by Peter E. Hanff

Robert D. Harlan died peacefully at his home in San Francisco on April 8, 2014. Although his health had been declining in recent months, he remained alert and much enjoyed the visits of many friends until the end. His wry sense of humor, the twinkle in his eyes, and his discussion of books, collectors, and associates continued to enrich his interaction with those around him.

Bob, as his friends called him, liked to remind us that, after all, he was from Nebraska. Perhaps that was to diffuse any general sense of caution he manifested. But his urbane sensibilities led him to embrace a rich and rewarding academic and social life for many years in Berkeley and then later in San Francisco. His curiosity, his love of books and music, his appreciation of fine dining, and his impeccable taste in fine art and home furnishings helped create an environment in which he flourished.

Bob was born in Hastings, Nebraska, where he attended public schools and Hastings College. Following time in the U.S. Army Security Agency (1952–1955) he earned degrees in history and library science at the University of Michigan, receiving his doctorate in library science in 1960. He taught at the School of Library Science at the University of Southern California and in 1963 was appointed assistant professor in the Graduate School of Librarianship at UC Berkeley. There he became associate professor in 1970 and professor in 1976. He later served as associate dean of the school from 1985 to 1986, and retired in 1993. His students at Berkeley acknowledge that he strongly influenced their interest in the history and art of the book, descriptive bibliography, and the quest for interesting and unusual books. Bob gave extra course credit to students who found early and rare imprints in the circulating collection of the University Library at Berkeley. Many such books were transferred to the Bancroft Library for preservation, and the students felt rewarded for their efforts on several fronts.

His scholarly publications covered a range of topics related to printing, from eighteenth-century printers William Strahan and David Hall to

nineteenth- and twentieth-century printers of San Francisco. His works on John Henry Nash, the Grabhorn Press, William Doxey, and Paul Elder are standards. In later years he continued to research the life and works of Anton Roman (1828-1903) expanding on his publication of *Anton Roman's Sketch of Bibliography* (1986).

Bob was a longtime member of the Bibliographical Society of America, the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, and the American Printing History Association. He served at various times on the editorial board and the board of directors of the Book Club of California and prepared for the Club *The Two Hundredth Book: A Bibliography of the Books Published by the Book Club of California 1958-1993* (1993).

Following his retirement Bob became an active associate of the Bancroft Library. There he worked with Elizabeth Reynolds in cataloging the Book Artifacts Collection. In addition, he conducted interviews with Jack Stauffacher and Sandra Kirshenbaum for Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office. Later he interviewed Andrew Hoyem and Peter Koch and prepared transcripts of those interviews, which are now part of the Robert Harlan Papers at Bancroft.

Such legacies of Robert D. Harlan will benefit readers and scholars for generations to come.



NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY
by Henry L. Snyder, Chair, Library Committee

The pace of new acquisitions has slowed somewhat in recent months. We did pick up a very interesting lot of ten California imprints at Bonhams. There were three items of particular importance. The first two were printed by Harold Berliner:

Christopher Logue. *War Music: An Account of Books 1–4 and 16–19 of Homer's Iliad*. Nevada City, 1999. Poems. Introduced by William Newsom. Colophon: "An edition of 300 numbered copies... of which 288 were printed on Somerset paper and 12 ... on Barcham Green's Finale and specially bound. Printed... by Harold Berliner with the assistance of Frank Cabral and Elton Foote... Designed by Wolfgang Lederer." Based on the edition published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Title page printed in red and black. Special binding with labels on spine and gold lettering. In slipcase.

Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*. Colophon: "750 were printed in the fall of 1976 by Harold Berliner with the assistance of Elton Foote and Judith Berliner. Illustrated by Wolfgang Lederer and printed on Ragston paper in Baskerville Type. Signed by Wolfgang Lederer."

The third item worth noting is an edition of *Selected War Poems of Wilfred Owen*, illustrated by Dale Barnhart. It was published in Pasadena by Vance Gerry at The Weather Bird Press in 1983 and printed letterpress by Patrick Reagh.

As I write we are fortunate to be acquiring a box of ephemera collected by David Belch, mainly related to San Francisco. Belch was director of public information at the San Francisco Public Library and later worked for California Book Auction Galleries. Most important for us are half a dozen stuffed envelopes of ephemera of the Cranium Press. Several years ago Clifford Burke gave us his entire collection of books and pamphlets which he had printed or been given by his friends. Now it is completed by a fine collection of his ephemera. When I wrote Clifford to tell him of our acquisition he replied, "David Belch and George Fox both kept big envelopes at Cranium, into which I put ephemera whenever I could

remember. One hundred pieces sounds about right, which from this remove seems rather impressive.”

We have now completed cataloging our Grabhorn Press Collection, at least all the books, and have a pretty good handle on the ephemera.



Boreas Fine Art

Artists' Books | Fine Press Books

1555 Sherman Avenue, Suite 362
Evanston, Illinois 60201 United States

Telephone 847 733 1803
www.boreasfineart.com

NEWS & NOTES

Inge Bruggeman Takes the Reins at the Black Rock Press

Transitions are taking place at the Black Rock Press at the University of Nevada, Reno. Longtime director Bob Blesse is retiring after thirty-two years and Inge Bruggeman will replace him at the helm.

A highly experienced book artist and letterpress printer, Inge has been teaching at the Oregon College of Art & Craft in Portland since 2000. Her courses include papermaking, typography, letterpress printing, and design. She is recently returned from a residency in Marseille, France, and a year of teaching in the Interdisciplinary Arts MFA program at Columbia College, Chicago. She studied at the University of California, Santa Barbara before moving to Oregon where along with teaching at Oregon College of Art and Craft, she ran Textura, a letterpress and book arts master studio, until 2010. She is a recipient of an Oregon Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship and several Regional Arts & Culture Council and Oregon Arts Commission Grants. Her work is shown and collected internationally. She makes fine press artists' books under her imprint INK-A! Press. Her artists' books and text-based art work explore the textual landscape that surrounds us, and her installation work investigates the book as a cultural icon and artifact.

Bob Blesse is extremely pleased to have Inge coming to the Black Rock Press, which was founded by Ken Carpenter back in 1965: "She's an outstanding book artist and teacher, one of the best in the country, and I know she'll be taking the work of the Press to new heights."



Exhibition: *Printers' Devils and Typographical Worries, a Retrospective*

During the merry month of May the San Francisco Center for the Book hosted the exhibition, *Printers' Devils and Typographical Worries*, representing forty years at Jungle Garden Press. From the SFCB website:

BCC member Marie Dern, founder of the press, began her career printing poetry and fiction by contemporary writers. Over the past forty years, she has

printed both editioned and unique books—often collaborating with visual artists (including her late husband Carl Dern) as well as poets Raymond Carver, Tess Gallagher, Kay Ryan, Bill Berkson, and others. The largest work on view (6 feet tall by 8 feet wide), Printers' Devils and Typographical Worries, is a unique collaboration created for her 1986 graduate exhibit in the Mills College Book Arts Program. Gallery visitors were invited to complete or alter the text, offering an extraordinarily inviting adventure into the book.

Dern's expertise, both typographic and on the letterpress, along with her glorious sense of humor, offers us a rich and imaginative collection, as well as fine examples of form and content. The exhibition was curated by Kathy Barr and contained more than forty-five books and broadsides showcasing Jungle Garden Press and its place in the illustrious tradition of Book Arts and Fine Presses in the Bay Area.

Bravo Marie!



Oscar Lewis Awards

On March 31, approximately 150 guests gathered to celebrate the 2014 Oscar Lewis Awards honoring Rebecca Solnit for her contributions to western history and Johanna Drucker for her contributions to the book arts. Testament to the popularity of the honorees, the event reached capacity within a week of its being announced, and, following hospitality at the Club, the ceremony itself took place in the rooms of the World Affairs Council on the second floor, better suited for a large crowd. After introductions by 2014 OLA committee members Roberto Trujillo and Theresa Salazar, the awardees each delivered a short talk—different from one another in subject matter and style of delivery, but each deeply engaging, memorable, and representative of the highest interests and values of the Book Club. The event has been described as the Book Club at its best. Excerpts from the talks follow.

Rebecca Solnit:

I grew up out west as a colonial subject, the way that Jamaica Kincaid grew up in the shadow of England, being taught about people,

places, things, and plants that had little to do with those around her. Growing up in the sixties and early seventies, we basically learned that history had happened elsewhere: the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the White House. And culture had happened elsewhere too: England, France, New York. We were outer satellites. I am old enough that I am of the era where children were taught that California's linguistically and culturally rich and diverse first peoples were just diggers who dug up grubs with sticks and that they were all gone. It was particularly satisfying to put a magnificent map of the many place names of the eighteenth century Ohlone and Miwok Bay Area at the front of my 2010 atlas of this region, *Infinite City*; most of those names were news to me, though some—Olema, Petaluma, Napa, Temescal—are still in use.

But growing up I was pointed east, and then went all the way east, to Paris, to begin my education. Paris had its uses, but when I came back I found my way, by twenty-one, to reexamining California. A Wallace Berman in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art collection, where I worked during graduate school, prompted me to investigate that milieu of California artists, filmmakers, and poets of what sometimes gets called the Beat Generation and several years later they became the subject of my first book. They had each chosen California consciously and they began to articulate for me what this place is, what is distinct about it, and why it matters. They were urban people, for the most part; my next book took me further into the west, for which of course I went east, into the Sierra and over it, into the history of the Indian wars, the resource wars, and the military presence that looms large here. I have always felt as though I wrote the histories that perhaps I should have just been able to read, at the same time that I'm grateful I'm not in one of the places whose history is so worked over. There is so much yet to be done and said about this part of the world. Which doesn't prevent me from being indignant about the ways this place has been seen as one with no history, no culture ("People in California don't read books," a friend's East Coast cousin told him)....

The west I love is the west of people who have made the place home, not in the sense of conquering and owning it, but of coming

to belong to it. This has been a great liberatory place for outsiders, a place where they came to reinvent themselves as drag queens or dance impresarios, poets and dreamers and healers, and many of them got the gift of liberation and moved on, from Mark Twain to Allen Ginsberg, Susan Sontag, and Seamus Heaney. Others stayed, and remade themselves to fit the place. And others grew up here. I think of Gary Snyder, who has been so exemplary: he grew up rural, agrarian, in the Pacific Northwest, and then came to California twice, but his California was not an outpost of the east, just as his poetry was not European poetry's cringing stepchild. He saw that this place exists in relationship to Asia and to the still-present Native American nations and out of that and the American vernacular and the good humor of people who work with their hands and have their feet on the earth formulated a personal style. That means a lot to me, this sense of our place as one that is out of the European shadow and in relation to Latin America, to Asia, and to Native America. Westerners are made as well as born...

Johanna Drucker (an audio recording of Johanna's full speech is available at www.bccbooks.org/programs/awards):

I am twelve years old, writing with a ballpoint pen in a wire-bound notebook. My handwriting has some of the loopy excesses that girls use to decorate their letters, particularly the majuscules, but for the most part the lines of neat writing unfold almost without corrections or changes in page after manuscript. I am writing a book. In my mind's eye my story is already a bound, finished, typeset work. It looks like the volumes of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, *Little Men*, *Jo's Boys* with their hard covers and illustrations. A year later and the book I imagined myself writing would have thin tissue paper pages and small type like the *Everyman Modern Classics* in which the works of Jane Austen, the Brontës, Thackeray, and others were issued....

Eight years later I am writing a book that is meant to be printed, a text composed in a quiet vacation afternoon at my parents' dining

room table in Philadelphia. I have already taken a class in creative writing and printmaking. I am about to do what I was always meant to do, print a book, a real book, a book that is typeset, bound into signatures, glued into covers. This time the book will go into the world. One copy of it, covered in red velvet covers, looking like some relic cast up from the remains of a Victorian parlor, with its lithographed bat-elf on the cover and peculiarly perverse contents shot through with themes of infantile sexuality and repressed everything written in an associative and figurative tone full of allusions and suggestive tongue-tripping twists of verse-like prose, would go to City Lights. A real publisher, one whose editorial perspective was cutting edge, experimental, characterized by its beat sensibility, the San Francisco company was the height of hip poetics. The book went out, optimistic, and back came a letter from a young man, David, who wrote that he and Philip Lamantia, the surrealist poet, and a group of others were reading my book aloud, passing it around, wondering who, I, its author might be. This was the moment of true frisson, of assured success, of realization that at last, at last, I might have arrived at some point of entry into those circles of artistic and literary life that I had dreamed of, read about, pictured myself as part of in the pages of books about Verlaine and Rimbaud, the Symbolists, Mallarmé's salons, or the troubled social networks of the Bloomsbury group. This was the social life of books, the very crucible of their conception as well as scene of their reception, the place where they really mattered because they circulated. I went to meet them. Very little happened....

I continue to make books produced by any number of a variety of means. I cannot learn to think in digital terms. The imprint of the "book" form is too strong. I make a tiny mockup and use it to guide my writing. Composition is ordered from the start by the regimes and decorums of book-ness. I cannot think outside the form or its derivatives—the page, the sheet, the pamphlet. I do not have a mind for electronic palimpsests and spatial illusions. My compositional disposition is literal, physical. I think writing in/as books.

And now, I do not tweet (make those short, pithy comments meant to be "followed" as quickly as they appear). Nor do I have a blog,

running like a sad flow of unbounded text, abject and trailing, into a “thread” of unstructured text. I am fascinated by these new imprints, templates for production, and how they work, with the collaborative and collective voice of the Wiki, the anonymity of a web page and the ability of the surface text to contain and conceal its editorial history simultaneously. I see that each format has its specificity. I can be amused by the games of spell-check poetics produced on devices, the combinatoric composition of a writing app, and the pop-up illusions of augmented reality prompted by a QR code on a printing page. I wonder, what happens when the boundary conditions of the book dissolve, when writing refreshes itself in real time, incorporating live feeds and event chains into its textual stream?

I know that every book is an argument for and about “the book” as a form. Books will not be gone until the imprint of their form disappears from the program of the mind, collective and individual, until the image of the iconic book, hard-covered, finite, autonomous in its existence, capable of moving across time and space, enduring. That notion, of the work defined by its boundedness, no matter how temporary or illusional, has such a strong imprint in the collective and individual mind, that books will not disappear until that defining image is gone.



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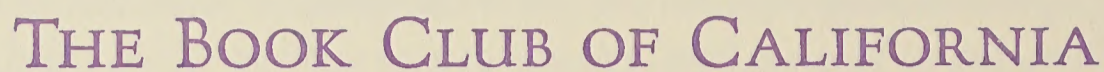
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